



In my research and study for the Year of Peace I came across some fascinating work by the great student of civilisation, Arnold Toynbee. He wrote 10 volumes, in his study of civilisation in which he took the Old Testament as his case history. He discovered that it's not inevitable that history goes in cycles – or that when you're up, you'll eventually go down. But what he did notice, was that if a nation state hit* its zenith and then comes to a point of crisis it will face an historic challenge.

The crisis asks the nation state a question about its essential morality. If self interest is the prevailing motivational force, (and that is often the case when nations are prospering there will be a polarisation within the community. It will tend to break up into two subgroups. Each will blame the other group for the problems at the heart of the nation. They will build myths and stories to justify their resentments of each other. And the further they go down those paths, the more their attitudes will harden, and the farther away the nation state will find itself from any hope of resolution – of a possibility of building a community of interest.

On the other hand, Toynbee observed that if, at the point of crisis a statesman or a prophet can rise and articulate a higher set of values -that the people can feel deeply in their heart and in their gut – they can be motivated to leave self interest. and be brought together, rising to the challenge. The very crisis itself will be, in subsequent history, celebrated as a key point of reference for the nation's self respect and confidence in its capacity to face and handle adversity.

Toynbee's Insights

Toynbee, who may well have died an agnostic, in examining the nation state of Israel as a historian, arrived at the fascinating conclusion that nations rise and fall depending on their relationship to the glory of God!

What was he talking about? It was what was disclosed to Moses – the Old Testament Figure who'd been having a heavy time. He was being called to leave Sinai and move on. He didn't know if he wanted to go down amongst that drivelling mumbling, grumbling lot of people he was trying to lead.

'Who are you? Disclose yourself to me. Reassure me of your presence. Show me your glory..' he says in Exodus 33 verse 18. And what is it that's disclosed? It comes up in chapter 34 where we see the Divine Being disclosing himself.

In this encounter with Moses we see the way Jehovah chooses to enter history. He may be beyond time and space, but he enters time and history through the expression of his moral nature. What he chooses to disclose is basically his justice, his mercy and his compassion. That is his glory! Glory is not, as we often believe, someone getting applauded. In the upper room discourse when Jesus said 'the One who will come, (the Holy Spirit) will 'glorify' me, what he means is, he will make visible my nature to you, and in you. Again in John 13, verses 30-32, when Judas goes out to betray him Jesus says 'Now is the Son of Man 'glorified' and God is glorified in him.'

A Great Contrast

In Judas we see the great contrast that Toynbee was looking at – self-interest versus justice, mercy and compassion. Here is Judas. going to betray Jesus, to sell him for 30 pieces of silver. (Isn't that the prevailing motivational force, expressed in that same way – the buying and selling of people because they're no longer valuable?)

In contrast, Christ understands, and right there at the point of betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Judas comes up to betray him with a kiss, he looks into his eyes with compassion, and says, 'Friend, what are you doing? Proverbs 17 verse 17 says 'a friend loves at all times.' Consistent to the end wasn't he?

You and I would have used the betrayal as an excuse to freeze up Inside, become defensive and hit back, to hurt. That's not the glory of God. No wonder the scripture says, 'All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.'

It's also interesting to note that the New Testament word for mercy, most literally means 'getting inside the skin of another.' It's only as we get inside the skin of each other, in whatever situation in which we find ourselves – empathize with the other, that we are able to yield our self interest in an intelligent way. The case could be put that marital conflict will only get resolved when the husband learns how to 'get Inside the skin' of the wife, and vice versa. Industrial relations will only find harmony when the working man can 'get inside the skin' of the business man and see what he's struggling with, and the business man 'gets inside the skin' of the working man to see what he's struggling with. It's only as the pilots can 'get Inside the skin' of airline management and vice versa....

Hurt and anger

One of the reasons there are so many angry street kids who are homeless, is that pre-occupied and self interested parents have no space in their consciousness for the complex world of the children they've brought into existence. This week In Australia 900 marriages will break up, because the glory of God went missing. The nation is fragmenting and going down Toynbee's predictable path, because self interest is prevailing rather than justice, mercy and compassion. One hundred Australians will make serious attempts on their lives today, because they're feeling powerless, alone and de-humanised. Nobody has gotten inside their skin!

We now begin to see why the prophets In the Old Testament would come and say 'Hows the widow, hows the orphan, hows the stranger in the land?' Because here was the clear measurement as to whether justice, mercy, and compassion were prevailing, or self Interest. If I was to ask you to write down a list of names of people who know what life is Me for you, I wonder how long your list would be. It's a good question, because it does 2 things.

Firstly, it's a measurement of the way you experience community. Community's not just living under the one roof, or in the same neighbourhood. It's the conviction you exist in the mind of another as a valued and understood individual. But more than that, its a measurement of mercy. We're told in the book of Romans to 'weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice, 'but when the glory of God goes missing, self interest prevails. We become so filled with ourselves, we have no room for others. With the glory of God going, also goes a sense of consideration for others.

The whole country is going through a period of radical change. Everybody's experiencing stress. It's perfectly normal in a time of stress, to close up, and for self interest to prevail. If there's not moral and spiritual strength to enable one to over ride one's own self Interest, the normal animal machinery within the human psyche simply goes into play and we become like Judas. And that's the beginning of the end of individuals, families and whole societies. So we now see Toynbee's point. It's when the crisis comes, that the real morality is seen.

That's why the Apostle Paul said about those living In the Spirit that 'the suffering of this time is not worthy to be compared with the glory of God that shall be revealed in us, to us and through us.' Of course for us, as Christians, the glory of God is more clearly seen, as Jesus indicated in the upper room, against the black backdrop of man's Innate self indulgent nature, as Jesus willingly goes to the cross and becomes suspended between heaven and earth – rejected by both – to be our ransom. In his own body, God's own justice and mercy collide. because of his great compassion. That's the only way to shalom-peace!

The Glory of God

So we see the glory of God entering history in his own Son. First of all, literally getting inside our skin, as a little baby in Bethlehem – then on the cross, to take our place. It's my firm belief that our country needs this message as never before. For without it, we have no morality. No understanding of the nature of goodness that is functional. It gets beyond the platitudes, and gives new handles to indicate the way forward.

Without the glory of God penetrating every area of human experience, it's an inevitable return to the jun- Yes, the glory of God means the great God of the universe has entered history and disclosed himself as the one who becomes vulnerable, because of his compassion; the one who'll not deny his justice because of his holiness. He longs for his church to join In his great work – the work of transforming history! To stand in the face of the rising tide of darkness, and to turn the tide.

The Apostle Paul says In the book of Colossians I verses 26 and 27, that 'the mystery that's been hidden from civilisations in the past is now disclosed to you, and It is that Christ is in you and among you, the hope of Glory.' Yes, our catechisms were right. The whole purpose of man Is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

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